

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O R 312200Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8685
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USBERLIN
USMISSION NATO

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 09233

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, WB, US, UR, UK, FR, GW, GE
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR STOESSEL'S LUNCHEON WITH ABRASIMOV-
DISCUSSION OF FLAG TOURS

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: SOVIET AMBASSADOR ABRASIMOV RAISED
TOPIC OF ALLIED FLAG TOURS REPEATEDLY THROUGHOUT
LUNCHEON GIVEN FOR AMBASSADOR STOESSEL IN EAST BERLIN
MAY 30 . ABRASIMOV INITIALLY REPEATED ESSENCE OF SOVIET
DEMARCHES IN CAPITALS IN APRIL, CLAIMING ALLIES HAD NO
RIGHT TO CONDUCT FLAG TOURS AND CALLING ON THEM TO
PHASE OUT FLAG TOURS OVER COURSE OF NEXT SEVERAL
MONTHS. IN FACE OF NON-POLEMICAL BUT INCREASINGLY
FIRM RESPONSES BY AMBASSADOR STOESSEL THAT ALLIES DID
NOT INTEND TO SURRENDER THIS IMPORTANT DEMONSTRATION
OF THEIR RIGHT OF ACCESS TO EAST BERLIN, ABRASIMOV
RETREATED SOMEWHAT, ARGUING THAT SOVIETS DID NOT CHAL-
LENGE ALLIES' RIGHT OF ACCESS, BUT MERELY OBJECTED

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TO FORM OF FLAG TOURS, WHICH ABRASIMOV CHARGED
WERE ENGAGING IN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES, AND TO
DISREGARD BY FLAG TOUR DRIVERS OF TRAFFIC REGULATIONS
IN EAST BERLIN. AMBASSADOR STOESSEL REJECTED CHARGES
OF ESPIONAGE AND ASSURED AMBASSADOR ABRASIMOV THAT FLAG
TOUR OPERATORS WERE INSTRUCTED SCRUPULOUSLY TO OBSERVE
TRAFFIC REGULATIONS IN EAST BERLIN, BUT HE REITERATED

THAT FLAG TOURS WOULD CONTINUE. ABRASIMOV ULTIMATELY SUGGESTED ALLIES AND SOVIETS WOULD HAVE TO AGREE TO DISAGREE ON SUBJECT, BUT EMPHASIZED THAT SOVIETS IN NO WAY CONCEDED RIGHT OF ALLIES TO CONDUCT WHAT HE TERMED "MILITARY PATROLS" THROUGH "CAPITAL OF GDR". END SUMMARY

2. AFTER PRESENTING SOVIET ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF GDR CLAIM THAT EAST BERLIN IS SOVEREIGN PART OF GDR AMBASSADOR ABRASIMOV LAUNCHED INTO PROLONGED MONOLOGUE OBJECTING TO WHAT HE TERMED "ILLEGAL PATROLLING OF CAPITAL OF THE GDR BY ALLIED MILITARY PATROLS." ABRASIMOV PREFACED HIS PRESENTATION WITH THE CLAIM THAT DURING PAST FOUR MONTHS THREE ALLIES HAD SENT 2,345 PATROLS, COMPRISED OF 5,979 MILITARY PERSONNEL, INTO EAST BERLIN. APPROXIMATELY TWO-THIRDS OF THESE PATROLS (5 TO 7 A DAY), HE CLAIMED WERE US "PATROLS", WHILE THE BRITISH SENT 2 TO 3, AND THE FRENCH 1 TO 2 PATROLS DAILY. (COMMENT: ACCORDING TO OUR FIGURES ALLIES HAVE SENT APPROXIMATELY JUST OVER 700 FLAG TOURS TO EAST BERLIN OVER THE PAST 17 WEEKS; US ABOUT 475; BRITISH AND FRENCH COMBINED APPROXIMATELY 238. EVEN USING MAXIMUM NUMBER OF DAILY PATROLS CLAIMED BY ABRASIMOV, WHICH IS TOO HIGH BY A FACTOR OF 2, NUMBER OF ALLIED FLAG TOURS IN PAST FOUR-MONTH PERIOD WOULD ONLY HAVE BEEN 1,308. END COMMENT). ABRASIMOV CONTINUED THAT IN SAME FOUR-MONTH PERIOD GDR HAD RECORDED OVER 600 TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS INVOLVING FLAG TOUR VEHICLES. SOVIETS EVEN TROTTED OUT DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHS OF SECRET

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ONE US, UK AND FRENCH VEHICLE EACH, SHOWING WHAT PURPORTED TO BE TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHY TAKING PLACE. IN ADDITION, SOVIETS HANDED POLAD NON-PAPER LISTING 15 RECENT ALLEGED VIOLATIONS INVOLVING US/UK/FRENCH FLAG TOUR VEHICLES. HE ALSO REPEATED OLD CHESTNUT OF NUMEROUS TOURS COMING BY TO PHOTOGRAPH SOVIET EMBASSY AND ITS VISITORS.

3. AMBASSADOR ABRASIMOV ADMITTED THAT SOVIETS HAD BEEN UNDER PRESSURE FROM GDR TO GET ALLIES TO CEASE FLAG TOURS, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF REPEATED TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS AND DANGER THEY POSED GDR CITIZENS BUT ALSO, ABRASIMOV CHARGED BLUNTLY, BECAUSE FLAG TOURS ARE USED TO SPY ON SOVIET AND GDR MILITARY AND INDUSTRIAL INSTALLATIONS.

4. STATING HIS STAFF HAD THOROUGHLY RESEARCHED MATTER, ABRASIMOV ARGUED THAT ALLIES HAD NO RIGHT TO CONDUCT FLAG TOURS BECAUSE THERE HAD NEVER BEEN ANY WRITTEN

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BONN
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AGREEMENT OR EVEN UNILATERAL SOVIET DECLARATION PERMITTING THEIR BEING CARRIED OUT. ALLIES HAD UNILATERALLY INSTITUTED FLAG TOURS, ABRASIMOV CONTENDED, AND WERE NOW SEEKING TO CONVERT PRACTICE INTO INALIEN-ABLE RIGHT. EVEN BEFORE PERMITTING AMBASSADOR STOESSEL TO RESPOND, ABRASIMOV CLAIMED TO PREEMPT WHAT HE ASSUMED WOULD BE ONE OF AMBASSADOR'S PRINCIPAL POINTS OF REPLY; THE CONTINUATION OF SOVIET MILITARY TOURS IN WEST BERLIN. ABRASIMOV CLAIMED SOVIETS CONDUCT NO MILITARY TOURS IN WESTERN SECTORS AND ADMITTED ONLY TO PRESENCE OF SOVIET VEHICLES TAKING SOVIET PERSONNEL TO BASC, SPANDAU AND SOVIET WAR MEMORIAL. OTHER VEHICLES SOMETIMES CAME FOR "EXCURSIONS".

5. RESPONDING TO ABRASIMOV AMBASSADOR STOESSEL IMMEDIATELY CHALLENGED THE SOVIET FIGURES (PARA 2), AND CHARACTERIZED THE FIGURE ON "ALLEGED TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS" AS EXTREMELY EXAGGERATED. AT SAME TIME, HE REGRETTED
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ANY TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS WHICH MIGHT HAVE OCCURRED AND ASSURED ABRASIMOV THAT FLAG TOUR OPERATORS WERE UNDER STRICT INSTRUCTIONS TO OBEY APPROPRIATE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS AND DRIVE CAREFULLY. AMBASSADOR ADDED IN PASSING THAT ALLIES ARE AWARE OF NUMEROUS TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS BY SOVIET VEHICLES IN WEST BERLIN, BUT HE SUGGESTED MATTERS OF THIS RELATIVELY LESSER MAGNITUDE BE LEFT TO THEIR STAFFS TO DISCUSS AND WORK OUT. HE DENIED THAT OUR TOURS PROVOCATIVELY PHOTOGRAPHED THE SOVIET EMBASSY, ALTHOUGH HE SURMISED THAT MANY TOURISTS DID SO.

6. AMBASSADOR STOESSEL THEN DEFENDED FLAG TOURS, WHICH, HE TOLD ABRASIMOV, ALLIES DID NOT VIEW TO BE ILLEGAL OR IMPROPER IN ANY RESPECT. ALTHOUGH THERE MAY NOT BE ANYTHING IN WRITING SPECIFICALLY SANCTIONING THEM, FLAG TOURS HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED BY ALLIES FOR YEARS AS AN EXERCISE OF OUR RIGHT OF ACCESS TO EAST BERLIN, WHICH IS AN ORIGINAL ALLIED RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY STEMMING FROM THE ALLIED VICTORY OVER NAZI GERMANY. THE AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED THAT THE ALLIES CONSIDER RIGHTS OF ACCESS TO BE VERY IMPORTANT, AND THAT WE LOOK UPON THE EXERCISE OF THOSE RIGHTS AS PART OF THE EXISTING SITUATION REFERRED TO IN THE QUADRIPARTITE AGREEMENT.

7. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD ABRASIMOV THAT THE US AND ITS UK AND FRENCH ALLIES HAD FRANKLY REGRETTED THAT THE SOVIETS HAD EVER CHOSEN TO RAISE THE FLAG TOUR ISSUE IN THE FIRST PLACE. HE REMINDED ABRASIMOV OF THE OFFICIAL ALLIED REPLY GIVEN IN CAPITALS, A REPLY WHICH WAS QUITE DIRECT AND VERY CLEAR AS TO ITS MEANING. AMBASSADOR STOESSEL CONCLUDED BY TELLING ABRASIMOV THAT WE DO NOT SEEK A CONFRONTATION OVER THE ISSUE OF THE FLAG TOURS. HE MADE QUITE CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE US AND THE OTHER ALLIES IN BERLIN CONSIDER THE QUES-
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TION A VERY IMPORTANT ONE AND THAT THE ALLIES WOULD LOOK UPON ANY EFFORT TO INTERFERE WITH THE FLAG TOURS TO REPRESENT A UNILATERAL MOVE BY THE SOVIETS TO CHANGE THE EXISTING SITUATION, A STEP WHICH WOULD NOT CONTRIBUTE TO MAINTAINING THE QUIET BOTH SIDES WISH TO SEE IN BERLIN AND WHICH COULD AFFECT ADVERSELY OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST TO US BOTH.

8. IN RESPONSE ABRASIMOV REVIEWED FOR FIVE OR TEN

MINUTES ARGUMENT THAT SOVIETS HAD RELINQUISHED ALL POWER IN EAST BERLIN, ARGUING THAT THERE WAS NO LONGER A "GREATER BERLIN" IN WHICH FOUR POWER RIGHTS COULD BE EXERCISED, AND THAT, THEREFORE, ALLIES COULD NOT HAVE SUCH RIGHTS IN EAST BERLIN. HE REITERATED HIS CHARGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY, AND SAID HE WAS TEMPTED TO DETAIN A TOUR IN FLAGRANTE, AND THEN CALL OVER AN ALLIED OFFICER TO SEE FOR HIMSELF. HE CONCLUDED, HOWEVER, BY OBSERVING THAT HE COULD SEE HE HAD NOT CONVINCED AMBASSADOR STOESSEL, NOR HAD HE ON OTHER HAND BEEN CONVINCED BY ARGUMENTS AMBASSADOR HAD PUT FORWARD. BEST SOLUTION WAS, ABRASIMOV CONCLUDED, "TO FACE REALITY" AND PERMIT US SIDE TO KEEP ITS OPINION AND THE SOVIETS TO KEEP THEIRS, WITH THE UNDERSTANDING, HE QUICKLY ADDED, THAT BY SO SAYING THE SOVIETS ARE NOT CONCEDING OR CONFERRING ANY RIGHTS TO FLAG TOURS. ABRASIMOV THEN ONCE AGAIN ASKED ALLIES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF THEIR FLAG TOURS AND OBSERVE THE TRAFFIC RULES IN THE GDR'S "CAPITAL".

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O R 312200Z MAY 77
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INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN
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9. AT LATER POINT IN CONVERSATION ABRASIMOV EMPHASIZED HE HAD NOT CHALLENGED ALLIES' RIGHT OF ACCESS TO EAST

BERLIN. HE HAD NO OBJECTION, FOR EXAMPLE, TO TOURS TO EAST BERLIN BY BUSLOADS OF GIS, WHO, HE ADDED, BEHAVED IN A RESPECTABLE MANNER. WHAT HE OBJECTED TO WERE THE "MILITARY PATROLS" (FLAG TOURS) WHICH HE CLAIMED WERE ENGAGED IN BLATANT ACTS OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING.

10. SUMMING UP, AMBASSADOR STOESEL REEMPHASIZED THAT ALLIES LOOKED UPON FLAG TOURS AS CONSTITUTING IMPORTANT EXERCISE OF ALLIED RIGHTS OF ACCESS TO EAST BERLIN. AND THEY WILL CONTINUE. HE REJECTED TOTALLY THE CONTENTION THAT FLAG TOURS WERE ENGAGED IN ESPIONAGE ACTIVITIES, BUT SAID THAT NEED TO OBSERVE EAST BERLIN TRAFFIC REGULATIONS WOULD BE REEMPHASIZED TO FLAG TOUR PARTICIPANTS. HE CONCLUDED BY NOTING THAT ANY EFFORTS TO INTERFERE WITH FLAG
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TOURS WOULD BE VIEWED MOST SERIOUSLY BY THE WEST.

11. COMMENT: THE EXCHANGE YIELDS NO CLEAR INDICATIONS AS TO FINAL SOVIET/EAST GERMAN INTENTIONS RE ALLIED FLAG TOURS, OR EVEN AS TO WHAT THEY WILL DO NEXT. THE NEW ELEMENTS OF THIS CONVERSATION WERE THE EMPHASIS ON ALLEGED TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS, AND THE PRODUCTION OF "STATISTICS". THESE MAY LEAD TO MORE SURVEILLANCE OF OUR VEHICLES IN AN EFFORT TO "DOCUMENT" EVEN MINOR TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS. USBER WILL COMMENT SUBSEQUENTLY ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOVIETS BEGINNING A GAME OF STATISTICS, WHICH IN THEIR FIRST VERSION ARE SOMEWHAT SURREALISTIC AND WILL ALSO REPORT ON THE LIST OF CLAIMED TRAFFIC INFRACTIONS.
STOESEL

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Message Attributes

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Channel Indicators: n/a
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Concepts: BERLIN ACCESS, ESPIONAGE, BERLIN QUADRIpartite MATTERS, STATUS OF BERLIN, MILITARY VEHICLES, DIPLOMATIC PROTESTS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
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Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
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